Nº 82. SATURDAY, *August* 26, 1786.

Je n'arme contre lui que le fruit de ſon crime.

CREBILLON.

THE effects of moral inſtruction and precept on the mind have been rated very highly by ſome grave and worthy men, while by others the experience of their inefficacy, in regulating the conduct of the hearer or reader, has been cited as an indiſputable proof of their unimportance. Among thoſe, ſay they, on whom Moral Eloquence has employed all her powers, who have been tutored by the wiſeſt and moſt virtuous teachers, and have had the advice and direction of the ableſt and moſt perſuaſive guides, how few are there whoſe future conduct has anſwered to the inſtruction they received, or the maxims which were ſo often repeated to them. Natural diſpoſition or acquired habits regulate the tenor of our lives; and neither the ſermon that perſuades, nor the relation that moves, has any permanent effect on the actions of him who liſtens or who weeps.

Yet, though examples of their efficacy are not very frequent, it does not altogether follow that

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the diſcourſe or the ſtory are uſeleſs and vain. Stronger motives will no doubt overpower weaker ones, and thoſe which conſtantly aſſail will prevail over others which ſeldom occur. Paſſion therefore will ſometimes be obeyed when reaſon is forgot, and corrupt ſociety will at length overcome the beſt early impreſſions. But the effects of that reaſon, or of thoſe impreſſions, we are not always in condition to eſtimate fairly. The examples of their failure are eaſily known, and certain of being obſerved; the inſtances of ſuch as have been preſerved from ſurrounding contagion by their influence, are traced with difficulty, and ſtrike us leſs when they are traced.

Formal precepts and hypothetical cautions are indeed frequently offered to youth and inexperience, in a manner ſo ungracious as neither to command their attention, nor conciliate their liking. He who ſays I am to inſtruct and to warn, with a face of inſtruction or admonition, prepares his audience for hearing what the young and the lively always avoid as tireſome, or fear as unpleaſant. A more willing and a deeper impreſſion will be made when the obſervation ariſes without being prompted, when the underſtanding is addreſſed through the feelings. It was this which ſtruck me ſo forcibly in the ſtory of *Father Nicholas*. I never

never felt ſo ſtrongly the evils of diſſipation, nor ever was ſo aſhamed of the ſhame of being virtuous.

It was at a ſmall town in Brittany, in which there was a convent of Benedictines, where particular circumſtances had induced me to take up my reſidence for a few weeks. They had ſome pictures which ſtrangers uſed to viſit. I went with a party whoſe purpoſe was to look at them: mine in ſuch places is rather to look at men. If in the world we behold the ſhifting ſcene which prompts obſervation, we ſee in ſuch ſecluded ſocieties a ſort of ſtill life, which nouriſhes thought, which gives ſubject for meditation. I confeſs however I have often been diſappointed; I have ſeen a group of faces under their cowls, on which ſpeculation could build nothing; mere common place countenances, which might have equally well belonged to a corporation of bakers or butchers. Moſt of thoſe in the convent I now viſited were of that kind: one however was of a very ſuperior order; that of a monk, who kneeled at a diſtance from the altar, near a Gothic window, through the painted panes of which a gleamy light touched his forehead, and threw a dark *Rembrandt* ſhade on the hollow of a large, black, melancholy eye. It was impoſſible not to take notice of him. He looked up, invo-

luntarily no doubt, to a picture of our Saviour bearing his croſs; the ſimilarity of the attitude, and the quiet reſignation of the two countenances, formed a reſemblance that could not but ſtrike every one. "It is Father Nicholas," whiſpered our conductor, "who is of all the "brotherhood the moſt rigid to himſelf, and "the kindeſt to other men. To the diſtreſſed, "to the ſick, and to the dying, he is always "ready to adminiſter aſſiſtance and conſolation. "No body ever told him a misfortune in which "he did not take an intereſt, or requeſt good "offices which he refuſed to grant: yet the "auſterity and mortifications of his own life "are beyond the ſtricteſt rules of his order; "and it is only from what he does for others "that one ſuppoſes him to feel any touch of "humanity." The ſubject ſeemed to make our informer eloquent. I was young, curious, enthuſiaſtic; it ſunk into my heart, and I could not reſt till I was made acquainted with Father Nicholas. Whether from the power of the introduction I procured, from his own benevolence, or from my deportment, the good man looked on me with the complacency of a parent. "It is not uſual," ſaid he, "my ſon, for people at your age to ſolicit acquaintance like "mine. To you the world is in its prime; "why ſhould you anticipate its decay? Gaiety

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"and cheerfulneſs ſpring up around you; "why ſhould you ſeek out the abodes of me-"lancholy and of woe? Yet though dead to "the pleaſures, I am not inſenſible to the cha-"rities of life. I feel your kindneſs, and wiſh "for an opportunity to requite it." —— He perceived my turn for letters, and ſhewed me ſome curious MSS. and ſome ſcarce books, which belonged to their convent: theſe were not the communications I ſought; accident gave me an opportunity of obtaining the know-ledge I valued more, the knowledge of Father Nicholas, the ſtory of his ſorrows, the cauſe of his auſterities.

One evening when I entered his cell, after knocking at the door without being heard, I perceived him kneeling before a crucifix, to which was affixed a ſmall picture, which I took to be that of the bleſſed Virgin. I ſtood be-hind him, uncertain whether I ſhould wait the cloſe of his devotional exerciſe, or retire un-perceived as I came. His face was covered with his hand, and I heard his ſtifled groans. A mixture of compaſſion and of curioſity fixed me to my place. He took his hands from his eyes with a quickened movement, as if a pang had forced them thence. He laid hold of the picture, which he kiſſed twice, preſſed it to his boſom; and then gazing on it earneſtly, burſt into

into tears. After a few moments, he clasped his hands together, threw a look up to heaven, and muttering some words which I could not hear, drew a deep sigh, which seemed to close the account of his sorrows for the time, and rising from his knees, discovered me. I was ashamed of my situation, and stammered out some apology for my unintentional interruption of his devotions.——" Alas! (said he) be " not deceived; these are not the tears of de-" votion; not the meltings of piety, but the " wringings of remorse. Perhaps, young man, " it may stead thee to be told the story of my " sufferings and of my sins: ingenuous as thy " nature seems, it may be exposed to tempta-" tions like mine; it may be the victim of " laudable feelings perverted, of virtue betray-" ed, of false honour, and mistaken shame."

My name is *St. Hubert*; my family ancient and respectable, though its domains, from various untoward events, had been contracted much within their former extent. I lost my father before I knew the misfortune of losing him; and the indulgence of my mother, who continued a widow, made up, in the estimation of a young man, for any want of that protection or of guidance which another parent might have afforded. After having passed with applause through the ordinary studies which the capital

capital of our province allowed an opportunity of acquiring, my mother ſent me to Paris, along with the ſon of a neighbouring family, who, though of leſs honourable deſcent, was much richer than ours. Young *Delaſerre* (that was my companion's name) was intended for the army; me, from particular circumſtances which promiſed ſucceſs in that line, my mother and her friends had deſtined for the long robe, and had agreed for the purchaſe of a charge for me when I ſhould be qualified for it. Delaſerre had a ſovereign contempt for any profeſſion but that of arms, and took every opportunity of inſpiring me with the ſame ſentiments. In the capital I had this prejudice every day more and more confirmed. The *fierté* of every man who had ſerved, the inſolent ſuperiority he claimed over his fellow-citizens, dazzled my ambition and awed my baſhfulneſs. From nature I had that extreme ſenſibility of ſhame, which could not ſtand againſt the ridicule even of much inferior men. Ignorance would often confound me in matters of which I was perfectly well informed, from his ſuperior effrontery; and the beſt-eſtabliſhed principles of my mind would ſometimes yield to the impudence of aſſuming ſophiſtry, or of unbluſhing vice. To the profeſſion which my relations had marked out for me, attention, diligence, and ſober

manners were naturally attached; having once set down that profession as humiliating, I concluded its attendant qualities to be equally dishonourable. I was ashamed of virtues to which I was naturally inclined, a bully in vices which I hated and despised. Delaserre enjoyed my apostacy from innocence as a victory he had gained. At school he was much my inferior, and I attained every mark of distinction to which he had aspired in vain. In Paris he triumphed in his turn; his superior wealth enabled him to command the appearances of superior dignity and show; the cockade in his hat inspired a confidence which my situation did not allow; and, bold as he was in dissipation and debauchery, he led me as an inferior whom he had taught the art of living, whom he had first trained to independence and to manhood. My mother's ill-judged kindness supplied me with the means of those pleasures which my companions induced me to share, if pleasures they might be called, which I often partook with uneasiness, and reflected on with remorse. Sometimes, though but too seldom, I was as much a hypocrite on the other side; I was self-denied, beneficent, and virtuous by stealth; while the time and money which I had so employed, I boasted to my companions of having spent in debauchery, in riot, and in vice.

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The habits of life, however, into which I had been led, began by degrees to blunt my natural feelings of rectitude, and to take from vice the restraints of conscience. But the dangerous connection I had formed was broken off by the accident of Delaserre's receiving orders to join his regiment, then quartered at Dunkirk. At his desire, I gave him the convoy as far as to a relation's house in Picardy, where he was to spend a day or two in his way. "I will intro-"duce you," said he in a tone of pleasantry, "because you will be a favourite; my cousin "*Santonges* is as sober and precise as you were "when I first found you." The good man whom he thus characterised possessed indeed all those virtues of which the ridicule of Delaserre had sometimes made me ashamed, but which it had never made me entirely cease to revere. In his family, I regained the station which, in our dissipated society at Paris, I had lost. His example encouraged and his precepts fortified my natural disposition to goodness; but his daughter, Emilia de Santonges, was a more interesting assistant to it. After my experience of the few of her sex with whom we were acquainted in town, the native beauty, the unaffected manners of Emilia, were infinitely attractive. Delaserre, however, found them insipid and tiresome. He left his kinsman's the third

morning after his arrival, promiſing, as ſoon as his regiment ſhould be reviewed, to meet me in Paris. Except in Paris, ſaid he, we exiſt merely, but do not live. I found it very different. I lived but in the preſence of Emilia de Santonges. But why ſhould I recall thoſe days of pureſt felicity, or think of what my Emilia was! For not long after ſhe was mine. In the winter they came to Paris, on account of her father's health, which was then rapidly on the decline. I tended him with that aſſiduity which was due to his friendſhip, which the company of Emilia made more an indulgence than a duty. Our cares, and the ſkill of his phyſicians, were fruitleſs. He died, and left his daughter to my friendſhip. It was then that I firſt dared to hope for her love; that over the grave of her father I mingled my tears with Emilia's, and tremblingly ventured to aſk, if ſhe thought me worthy of comforting her ſorrows? Emilia was too innocent for diſguiſe, too honeſt for affectation. She gave her hand to my virtues (for I then was virtuous), to reward at the ſame time, and to confirm them. We retired to Santonges, where we enjoyed as much felicity as perhaps the lot of humanity will allow. My Emilia's merit was equal to her happineſs; and I may ſay without vanity, ſince it is now my ſhame, that the ſince wretched St. Hubert was then thought to deſerve the bleſſings he enjoyed.